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Carmelle makes fresh start

(Continued from page 1)

York neighborhood with an English gentleman she had met in Africa. Although she was wealthy, she said she did not have much use for her money.

"You can afford not to be interested in material things when you have money," she said.

In 1977 doctors discovered that a large piece of metal that had lodged in Carmelle's heart had started to move. Although that probably was the 15th operation she had had since the explosion two decades before, this one was different. Following the surgery, a doctor told Carmelle she only had 10 or 11 months to live.

"For me, this was not entirely bad news," she said. "At that point in my life, living was the hard thing, not dying." she added. Having to live each day without a reason to do so was difficult, she explained.

An innate sense of optimism kept her going, she said. "I called health clubs but they didn't want me because I couldn't see, and I had a guide dog."

A small club finally accepted the woman.

The assistant manager, the first born again Christian that I've ever met, was aptly named Joy," Carmelle recalled.

Soon Carmelle began patronizing the club six hours a day, six days a week. There, Joy had a full-time ministry, she said.

"I was very cynical at that point, so I asked her a lot of miserable questions. I had no cause for an answer. I just wanted to make her uncomfortable," Carmelle confessed.

After enduring nine months of harassment, Joy invited her skeptical patron to lunch.

"During lunch, she asked if I would accept Jesus Christ as my lord and savior. I said 'Oh,' and I prayed 'Lord Jesus, you can be the Lord of my life, but you have two weeks to straighten this out,'" Carmelle told her audience.

The cynicism started to vanish. Three days after the luncheon, Carmelle said she called Joy and asked if she could get her The Bible in braille.

Joy replied that she had ordered 50 book six months ago, and that it just had arrived the previous day. Joy also informed her that she could not obtain one of the books in the set.

That Sunday, Joy invited Carmelle to visit a new church with her. At that church, a man met Carmelle and sold her that God had directed him to give her some tapes of the New Testament. These tapes contained the scripture that was included in the missing volume of her braille set, she said.

That was the key moment for her, Carmelle said. Right then, she said she had to choose: to believe that this encounter was a conspiracy between the man and her friend or by a sign that God really cared.

"I chose to believe the Lord cares," she explained.

"It was that night that the nightmares had stopped," she said with awe.

"The Lord knows when you have nothing left to give, and he meets you right there," she said.

Ten, then eleven months had passed, and Carmelle was still alive. The doctors explained that the metal was gone from her heart. They theorized that it had passed slowly enough through the muscle that it was allowed to heal.

After hearing this good news, Carmelle vowed: "I decided to give Christ an eternity."

To purge herself of her former lifestyle, Carmelle took a trip to Africa and gave away her entire ill gotten fortune. She said she made anonymous donations to the poor and to the hospitals that served them.

"I had to make a fresh start," she explained. "I could not live in both worlds."

After returning to the states she immediately broke up with her boyfriend and began to apply for religious schools. "I was rejected because I was blind and kind a guide dog," she said.

Someone suggested that she go to Costa Rica to help the ministry there, she said.

"Three days before I left for Costa Rica, a man approached me on the street and said, 'You know, in my ministry, the blind have a much worse.' Wouldn't you know it? He was from Costa Rica, she told the audience.

The man insisted that the blind stranger stay with his mother.

The mother accompanied by 90 of her relatives met Carmelle at the airport, she recalled. And not one of them spoke English!" she added.

"Every time I opened my mouth, somebody stuck ice-cold beans in it," she said of her amiable hosts.

Carmelle said she spent six months there studying Spanish and scripture.

"Because I couldn't communicate well with anyone I spent 12-15 hours a day in the Lord," she said.

Before long, she had found a church where services were conducted in English. She became a board member on a ministry team there. "I had conducted 14 Bible studies a week," she recalled.

Life was becoming good to Carmelle. She had support from her church and her surrogate family in Costa Rica. She desired to share her new found joy with a child.

First, she tried adoption agencies, then private adoption. When those failed, she put an ad in a newspaper.

She received a quick reply about a baby girl, but the child's family soon changed its mind. Months later, the family reconsidered and brought little Sashka to her.

Having a daughter to love was another milestone in Carmelle's life.

God has shown me that I have the actual ability to love a child," she mused. In her early days, Carmelle thought she was not capable of love, she said.

Having Sashka makes all the difference in the world," she whispered proudly. "Everything she puts her arms around, my neck. I feel the presence of Jesus Christ. The mother said while tears rolled down her cheeks.

Carmelle and Sashka left Costa Rica and now live on Greenhouse Road. Sashka is a student at Dillsburg Elementary School, became a United States citizen last spring.

Carmelle keeps busy caring for her daughter and participating in the ministry at the West Shore Evangelical Free Church in Mechanicsburg. She conducts a women's Sunday school class there.

Missionaries from her church in Costa Rica had directed Carmelle to the Mechanicsburg church, she said. They also told her that rural Dillsburg would be an ideal place to raise Sashka.

In the past few years Carmelle was reunited with her own mother and brother following the death of the abusive stepfather.

"The grace, love and power of God to change your life is moving," she concluded. "He wants to put you in a higher dimension."

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Deb's Country Corner

Deb's Country Corner

We've survived Hunted Hog's Day, and at least partially recovered from Valentine's Day, and this week we celebrate President's Day. I'm sure George and Abe would be proud to know that the country they loved so much now honors them with a National Holiday. And so it should. Fly your flag, wear your red, white and blue long johns, or bake a cherry pie. Take a moment to remember these two distinguished presidents, and say a small thank you to them. In the tradition of George's reputation with cherry trees I thought I'd share a real "cherry" of a recipe with you.

CHERRY CRISP

1 cup flour
1/2 cup sugar
1/2 cup packed brown sugar
1/2 cup butter
1 1/2 cups bread cubes made from toasted whole bread
3 cups cherry pie filling

Heat oven to 350 degrees. Sift flour, sugar together. Add brown sugar and mix well. Cut butter into flour mixture till crumbly. Butter bottom and sides of an 8x8x2 inch baking dish. Arrange the bread cubes in dish. Spread the cherry pie filling over the bread cubes. Cover cherry pie filling with the crumbly topping, and pat it down. Bake 40-45 minutes.

You know, this recipe originally used home canned sour cherries, that you then added sugar, corn starch and such, to make it thickened. But I simplified it. But looking back over the worn recipe, it brought to mind the jars of canned cherries in my grandmothers cellar. Not a basement, a cellar. With a dirt floor that was like hard packed cement, except for the bumps and dips where the ground hadn't packed down even. It had one light bulb at the end of a single electric cord, with a 12 inch chain switch hanging from the whole shebang. You groped around in the dark, hoping you didn't run into too many cobwebs, reaching for that elusive chain to pull. After a few times, you had memorized where it was, so you usually went right to it. The cellar was lined with rough wooden shelves, every canned food item in its proper place, grouped with similar items. There were several "iron trunk" floor supports you had to walk around, that were holding up the enormous oak beams of the floor above you. And most time, there was a 4 foot stalk of green bananas hanging over in this corner. Between the bananas, the potatoes in cold storage, and the dirt floor I used to think the place smelled terrific! It was like an adventure going down those steep ladder steps and entering this world. There were stone walls, whitewashed once a year not painted, whitewashed! And, I am told, there used to be several sauerkraut crocks in the corner. One corner held an empty coal bin. that was especially dark. To a child, the place was just spooky enough to be intriguing. Somehow, in my memory, I don't recall the spiders, occasional mouse, and the jars that didn't seal, and exploded all over everything but then I have been accused of having one of those "selective memories" about more than one thing. Usually it's my little boy who is doing the reminding, when I relate one of his little escapades to someone. You know, the difference between a little rascal and a juvenile delinquent is whether its your child or somebody elses'.

Well, let me close with a little household hint. And I sure hope you readers send some of these in, because I only have a few.

Deb's County Household Hint. If you're in a real pinch for a pot scratcher, roll up a ball of aluminum foil. It works well, although it doesn't last too long. Found this out at the last church supper. Unfortunately I found it out because I had KP duty.

Bye for this week.
Deb Westbrook
Deb's Country Corner

Saltwork Theatre Company

Continued from page 1

On Thursday, March 8th, students at the Northern High School I am the Brother of Dragons will be presented. I am the Brother of Dragons is an original drama with music that depicts the psychological and emotional toll that adolescent chemical dependency takes upon a typical American family.

Each program is prepared with a step by step activities guides designed for classroom use with pre- and post-performance. A question and answer period follows each performance.

A special public presentation will be held Wednesday, March 7th at 7:00 p.m. at the Northern Middle School. Presented will be I am the Brother of Dragons. There is no charge.

SALTWORKS is the theatre division of the Christian Arts Company, a non profit, non denominational, visual and performing arts organization that creates and sponsors events that present hope and wholeness. The Christian Arts Company, based in Pittsburgh, was incorporated in 1982.

In 1983 SALTWORKS Theatre Company joined with St. Francis Medical Center's Chemical Dependency Program to create programming that would educate the community about chemical dependency. St. Francis Medical Center contains one of the oldest and most comprehensive drug and alcohol treatment programs in eastern United States. The actors from SALTWORKS receive their training on the St. Francis Chemical Dependency Adolescent Unit where they follow the program's three-fold family program of evaluation, treatment and aftercare.

The Northern Community Task Force was able to bring the SALTWORKS Theatre Company to the Dillsburg area by applying and receiving Grass monies from Pennsylvanians Against A Costlier Society. A coalition for drug and alcohol awareness working for drug free youth in Pennsylvania.

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